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PHILLIPS BROOKS ¹

LEIGHTON PARKS

NEW YORK

St. John tells us that when Jesus was parting with his friends he comforted them with the assurance that, though for a little while they should not see him, the time would come when they should have a deeper understanding of his life.

It is twenty-five years since Phillips Brooks died, and as we think of what he was to those who knew him, how great our loss has been, let us hope that some such experience as John prophesied has been ours in our relation to our great friend. We can no longer see him as in the days when his great physical presence loomed above us, and his cordial welcome greeted us, and his wisdom filled us with a sense of the richness of life, or even as when in this pulpit he made our insignificance seem accidental and our possibilities the reality which God would glorify. But because he too has gone to the Father we may be able to have a clearer understanding of the spiritual significance of his life, as we think not alone of what he was to us but still more of what he "was worth to God."

In *The Life of Stopford Brooke*, a brilliant preacher contemporary with Brooks, in many ways most unlike him but physically his peer, there is a description of his presence so perfectly applicable to Brooks that I venture to quote it:

"His message never seemed a burden to him; it came forth unlaboured, a spontaneous utterance sustained with joy, with passion,

¹ An address delivered in Trinity Church, Boston, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Phillips Brooks, January 23, 1918.

and with an affluence of fine and fitting words. His form and figure in the pulpit were a vision of the higher opportunities of man. To look at him was to be lifted up, kindled, reassured. He had the air of one born in a better world than this, and a cloud of glory from his birthplace seemed to follow him. Virtue went out from his presence, and though some were left cold and untouched, there were always many to whom the sight of his face, as he delivered his message, or administered the Holy Communion, was as the breath of a new life. His published sermons stand high in the literature of the pulpit, but no eloquence of the written word can convey the power of enforcement that lay in his personality. The influence struck deep while he was in the act of speaking, and when the sermon was over, the mind would linger on the image of the man, and unconsciously construct a greater sermon for itself.”²

This is a description of power and beauty. The last line in particular reminds us, I think, of a test of genius. When we read the clever writers or listen to the words of men of more than ordinary gifts, how often is the effect depressing! We feel the distance that divides our ordinary minds from theirs. We feel the hopelessness of ever doing as well as they have done. That is a common experience which every reader knows. It is an experience that the clergy perhaps alone can appreciate in listening to a man whom they recognize as their superior. I remember well at the beginning of my ministry hearing two distinguished preachers, one a gifted minister of the Congregational Church in America, Dr. Richard S. Storrs, and another a brilliant ecclesiastic of the Anglican communion, Canon Liddon. I remember coming away from the hearing of both these men discouraged, feeling how impossible it would be ever to do the brilliant work they were doing. But I never listened to Brooks, and I doubt if any minister ever listened to him, without experiencing that exhilaration which “unconsciously constructs a greater sermon for itself.” It was like reading Shakespeare. We felt

² *Life and Letters of Stopford Brooke*, by Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, Vol. II, p. 357.

for a moment that it was a mere accident that prevented us from saying what he was saying, from seeing what he saw; the reason being that the rod of genius causes the waters to gush forth from the rock, which without that touch could never have found issue; and as the stream comes forth, it mingles with the river of life and is thereby glorified.

As we consider the divine gift of the sublime physical presence of the man, we see that his life was sacramental, the physical was but the outward and visible sign of abounding spiritual vitality. In the beautiful poem embodied in the Book of Genesis, "Joseph," the poet says, "is a fruitful vine. His branches run over the wall." How true this was of the man of whom we are thinking today! Indeed, if we are limited, as we now are, to one word by which we may express the characteristic of Phillips Brooks, shall we not say it is the luxuriance of his nature, the abounding vitality of the man, the inexhaustible faith, the ever-widening love, and the eternal hope?

The first and most important manifestation of his abounding vitality was a luxuriant faith. His early religious life was nourished in the evangelical atmosphere, and personal faith in Jesus Christ was the root of his wonderful ministry. It began, no doubt, with the child's love and reverence for the Saviour who lived long ago; it passed into the youth's discipleship for a Master whom he revered and obeyed; but it grew into a mystic communion unmarred by fancies or self-consciousness. To him Jesus was an ever-present friend. The love that is usually divided between wife and children he gave to his Lord, who was "closer to him than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." There was the hiding of his power; and there, I suspect, lay the secret of that strange aloofness which no one penetrated. It admits of no analysis. It will be judged abnormal by the

positivist, and natural by those who have experienced even a moment of the communion of God through Christ.

But here was the wonder: This mysticism neither became morbid nor reacted into rationalism. This was, no doubt, due first to the practical demands of his ministry, and secondly to the fact that his intellectual nature was vigorous and ever growing. As a rule, two such elements are apt to be in conflict; and as a result the spiritual nature is troubled and one becomes the master and determines the direction of life. This was the experience of Newman, whose rationalism turned to scepticism and then scepticism in panic sought sanctuary at the altar. Or, as in the case of Froude and others of the mid-Victorian age, the rational overcame the mystic and scepticism became the habit of life. But with Brooks the mystic and the rational seemed to develop without conflict. What he said of Tennyson's poetry describes himself: "Thought is saturated in emotion;" and so his religious life was as serene and mellow as a day in June.

If those who knew him best found that there were chambers in his soul to which no one was admitted, they found also that his intellectual hospitality was unbounded. "A Broad Churchman," he once said, "is not one who holds certain opinions, but one who holds his opinions on a rational basis;" and with all such he delighted to commune. He certainly could give an answer if asked the reason of his faith. That reason led him far away from the dogmatic teaching of his youth. The evangelical theology in which he was trained was based on the Atonement, and the Atonement was popularly identified with the theory of the substitution of a sinless Victim for a guilty sinner and by that substitution God's wrath was turned away. It was almost certain that a youth in whose veins ran the blood of

Unitarians, who had been bred at Harvard when it was a denominational college, who read the sermons of Channing and had hosts of Unitarian friends, could not long rest satisfied with such a dogma, and he did not. But the wonder was that, having broken with that theology, he did not react and abandon the ministry of a Church whose Liturgy justifies men in holding such a theory of Divine righteousness. His evangelical brethren thought he must be a Unitarian, and some of his Unitarian friends could not see how he could be anything else.

It was because of his luxuriant faith. His branches ran over the wall, and their leaves were nourished by rain and sunshine that the plants of lesser growth could not obtain. He never pretended that he was in sympathy with many of the opinions embodied in the Liturgy and the Creeds, but he did believe that his faith could be expressed in those archaic forms. He believed that those forms had been created to *preserve* the faith and that they had done so, but he never thought of them as *containing* a growing faith. The branches of the growing Church's life ought to run over the wall.

The mistake his puzzled critics made was in supposing that when he no longer assented to an opinion long identified with an Article of Faith, his faith had grown less, whereas it had expanded. The problem of the Creeds arises not from paucity of faith — very little is required for conformity — the problem arises when faith has grown great. "Keep the branches within the wall," cries the timorous traditionalist. "Let the branches hang over the wall till they tear up the roots," cries the radical. But this man of great faith had the roots of his life embedded in the past and drew nourishment from soil which the fastidious would not touch, while his branches were growing into and toward the light.

Let me try to make this clearer by an illustration drawn from an unpublished Good Friday address. Every student of theology knows what a part the word "satisfaction" played in the Calvinistic system, and how the conscience of the New England Churches at length rose up against all that it implied. No one was more in sympathy with the protest than Brooks. No one shrank more from all the horrid travesty of Calvary than he; yet, though the Incarnation had come to be the centre of his thinking, he never lost the message of the Atonement. On one occasion he spoke of Jesus Christ's death as a satisfaction to his Father—and instantly illumined the whole dreadful controversy by asking, "How can a son's death be a satisfaction to his father?" Then, no doubt with the memory of his brother's death in the Civil War in mind, he poured out his heart in praise of the son who gave his life for a great cause and the father's supreme satisfaction in knowing his son had died to free his brother-man. For God to have His will perfectly done on earth by a Son that shrank from no pain, not even death, trusting and loving his Father in his agony, surely with that, not the wrath but the love of God was satisfied. It was his luxuriant sympathy that enabled him to get at the heart of the truth and so find a ground on which good men might meet.

That sort of thing did not please the literalist, and sometimes he would speak of it with a pitying smile as "poetry," as if poetry were a common thing which any man might have who wished it, whereas logic was a rare gift which he and a few others possessed! And, on the other hand, there were those who took a less charitable view of a man who, they said, each week recited words which he did not believe, and either asserted plainly that he was dishonest or else saved his veracity at the expense of his intelligence. It seems

incredible to those who knew Brooks, knew his scrupulous accuracy, his uncompromising insistence that, a lie being a vile thing, a man should not touch it even to save his own life or his friend's, that any one could believe it possible that he could be capable of disingenuousness! Indeed, no one who knew him did suppose it. But it hurt him cruelly to have any one think it. Indeed, I believe he was never quite the same after the unworthy hesitation of his Church to crown his years of service with even such an inadequate acknowledgment as the episcopate. But men were puzzled then as they are now, and, while it is not possible at such a time to enter into a discussion of the ethics of subscription, it is possible to say, in a word, how Brooks looked on his allegiance to the formularies of his Church.

He loved the Church which he served with all the energy of his nature. He felt the serene beauty of its service, he knew its educating, purifying influence upon the devotional life, but he recognized its dangers. He once laughingly said he intended to move in General Convention that a rubric be prefaced to the Morning Prayer providing that "All the services in this book shall be used at the discretion of the minister." None knew better than he that the discretion of ministers must be largely increased before the laity would submit themselves to their vagaries. He looked on the Prayer Book as a charter of liberty, freeing minister and congregation alike from the tyranny of the passing fashion in thought or act. But his love for his own Church did not blind him to the excellency of the many ways by which the spiritual life is nourished in other Churches. There was no element of condescension in his ministrations in other communions. "Where Christ is, there is the Church," and "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," were the poles of his Christian fellowship. He once said, "When Bishop Meade ordained me, he

authorized me to exercise my ministry in the Episcopal Church; *he* did not make me a minister."

To his Church then he was indeed loyal, but he believed his first loyalty was to truth. He found the Liturgy and the Creeds already formulated, and he used them as tools for effective work. He found no difficulty in so doing. They did not exhaust his faith; they symbolized it. Much of the conventional opinion identified with them he utterly repudiated, although he could and did use them as sometimes unsatisfactory statements of his own opinions but never as contradictory to them. Had he felt they were that, he would have ceased using them. But he would not be judged by another man's conscience. He claimed the right, not "to stretch the Creeds," in the ecclesiastical slang of the day, but to interpret them according to his own private judgment guided by sound learning. He admitted that there were limits to that. He approved Stopford Brooke's leaving the Church of England, but he rejoiced that a man like Dean Stanley could continue to serve it. But the limit must be found by the individual minister. He was scornful of the suggestion that men would hold on to the ministry for its rewards while their consciences rebuked conformity. He was at one time tempted to leave the Episcopal Church, not because he was uneasy in its doctrines but because he feared it might abandon the Protestant position which ensures the freedom in which alone he believed any Church could minister to America. He had been for many years the liberal leader of the Church. He weathered the storms that centred round the dogma of Creation and the theory of the Atonement. He died just as the storm centre was shifting to the Incarnation and the Resurrection. But the principle would have held him had he lived till now, that any man who, with expanding knowledge and deepening faith declared that he could with clear conscience use the Prayer Book,

should be not "tolerated" but honored. He used to say: "How can any human being know the exact significance of the words of the Creeds to the men who first used them? If that be insisted on, we build on doubt. We may guess, but then we are in difficulties. What did they mean when they spoke of God? If a man were to ask me if I believe in God, I could not give a categorical answer, for I do not know what he means, possibly something that I repudiate; but if he let me say I believe in God, I will answer, though my God may seem to him unworthy of his worship." But he did believe there was spiritual value in the recitation of a creed, for the unity to which this act witnesses is a common faith in Infinite Power and Wisdom and Love, mediated by Christ, to whom in the Creed we express our loyalty.

Another manifestation of the abounding vitality of his spirit was seen in his sympathy. One of his friends, who ought to have known better, once said that he was interested in man but not in men. This opinion was, I think, widespread, and was due to the modesty of the man, who shrank from the flattery that shallow souls thought would please the popular preacher. To such he was not genial—he was grim! But if any soul needed him, he poured out the riches of heart and mind. Only one who has stayed in his house and seen the steady stream of men and women who came all day long with fears and doubts, with sins and sorrows, can know that, great as he was as a preacher, he was far greater as a pastor. One night he was to meet a friend at a large reception and they were to return together. He did not come, and at midnight his friend started for home and met him. He explained that as he was leaving his house, a messenger had come saying a poor negro in the hospital wished to see him. He went at once, and found a sorry creature who in despair had cut his throat and then, slowly dying, had sent for the only minister of whom

he had ever heard and was comforted and, I hope, saved. On another occasion he came in late at night, explaining that he had been at a wedding. When it was remarked that it was a late hour for a wedding, he said, "Oh, it was long ago, yesterday I think, but I went to the reception and enjoyed myself so much that the time slipped away." "What did you do?" "Well, it was a colored couple, and they asked me to their rooms on Cambridge Street, and I had a wonderful time—sat in a rocking-chair and ate ice-cream and sponge-cake and talked to a dear old woman!" We are reminded of Bacon's words, "The nobler a soul is, the more objects of compassion it hath." But the love of this man was greater than compassion. He is indeed hard-hearted who is devoid of pity, unwilling or unable to "weep with them that weep"—compassion is indeed the test of nobility; but to "rejoice with them that do rejoice" is a higher test. How the joyful love of his great heart went forth to all in their joy—the child with its new toy, the youth in the "hazard of new fortune," the bride with shining eyes gazing into the mystery of motherhood! But it went deeper than that; it was the motive of all his preaching, it gave momentum to all his utterance. No one left the church without hearing a declaration of his love. He loved *souls*. He was eager to reveal the soul to itself, that it might know the joy of its Lord. It was Christ in each, the hope of glory, to which he spoke; so that deeper than the superficial accidents of life, deeper than the intellectual problems, deeper than sorrow or sin, went the word of God, who is love filling each heart with strange joy as the Christ in each is born. That was why multitudes who never spoke to him loved him.

Of his friendships with men of like mind with himself I may not speak except to say this, that I do not suppose there ever was a great man who so respected the person-

ality of his friends. They forgot his greatness because there was the give and take of argument as between equals. If advice was asked, it was seldom given, but instead the problem would be drawn out by the Socratic method without its irony, in such a way that when it was brought to light the truth of the matter was seen. I think in all his dealings, especially with younger men, he dreaded imposing the authority of his character upon them. He called no man master. He would have been shocked to hear any man call him master. The character for which in the Church's history he had the greatest horror was not the inquisitor but the "spiritual director." I have often thought that it was remarkable that with all his friends, especially among the clergy, there was no imitation of mannerism. Every man who knew him became a better and a larger man as a result of that friendship, because he became more fully himself. If Brooks dreaded the imposition of his own authority lest the individuality of his friend be warped, still more did he dread any word, however deserved, that would discourage any soul. A friend once said of some one who, he believed, had done him wrong, "When I next see him, I shall tell him just what I think of him," and Brooks cried out, "Oh don't; he might believe it true." Every one laughed at the repartee, but his face was sad, for what he felt was the horror of discouraging a fellow-man.

But there was another side to his character. With his pity went scorn, not the scorn of the successful man for the failures, nor the scorn of the man of affairs for the inefficient, not even of the wise for fools, but the scorn of humility for pretence. When the current of a materialistic interpretation of the universe was running strong, he was not disturbed. He knew in Whom he had believed, and kept his mind clear from the confusion between truth and hypothesis. He was no more in-

fluenced by scientific than by theologic dogmatism. He looked with pity on the ministers who wildly applauded one of Joseph Cook's Monday morning refutations of infidelity, as a sign of fear. He read all the great writers who made the Victorian age as great in science as the Elizabethan had been in literature, but he spoke with scorn of "the fatuous self-confidence" of those who, lacking in the humility of Darwin and Pasteur, would complacently have heard Job's scornful question, "Where wast thou when God laid the foundations of the earth?" When the pulpit was being turned into a rostrum for the discussion of the relation of science and religion, he ignored the controversy and comforted God's people, remembering the prophet's words, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."

I think it was this scorn of dogmatism which prejudiced him against the Higher Criticism, in which his younger friends were so deeply interested. Once when one of them complacently remarked that he had just finished Ewald's History of Israel, Brooks remarked, "Six volumes of dogmatics!"

But his scorn of dogmatism did not equal his disgust at pretentiousness. The Bishop who spoke of *his* clergy and *his* diocese, and, with entire ignorance of the Church's life before or since the Oxford Movement, spoke of the episcopate as the guardian of the Faith, he could not away with. He generally dismissed him from his mind with the characteristic, "Preposterous creature!"

Of the luxuriance of his imagination there is no need to speak at length. It explains, I think, the anomaly of his inconspicuous undergraduate life and his failure as a school-teacher. In the days at college he was laying the foundation of his scholarly life, sinking the roots deep into classic soil, and bathing the leaves of life in poetry, especially in Wordsworth and Browning, and,

above all, Tennyson. It was only when he dedicated his life to the service of Christ that he discovered how this rich imagination, which had been the shy companion of his soul, was now to become the glory of his mature life. In the first sermon, as in the last, the branches of the imagination ran over the wall, so that the way-farer outside the garden of the Church could reach up and enjoy the fruit so joyously offered.

This, then, was the man: loving the Lord his God as he was revealed in the man Christ Jesus, with all his heart and mind and soul and strength; loving his neighbor as himself, with all the respect and pity and sympathy and affection that he was thankful to receive. With ever-growing knowledge his faith grew deeper and simpler. He was a great revealer of God.

He might have applied — I have no doubt he did apply — to himself the words he loved so well:

“Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith; we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see.
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness; let it grow.

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before.”

None like him shall be seen, because, like every genius, he was primarily the interpreter of his time. The time has gone and he has gone, but God lives, and a new messenger will come to prepare the way of Christ. May the new prophet have his faith, his love, his abound-

ing hope, ever renewed and reinvigorated by communion with Jesus Christ — the one power in humanity which, amid all the changes and chances of this mortal life, is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” That was the faith of Phillips Brooks. That too is our faith, and from it grows our confidence as we gaze into the portentous future that “as God was with our fathers so will He be with us.”